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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT SIGNS ON TO ARMENIAN-POLISH JOINT PARTICIPATION IN IRAQ--BUT AT WHAT DOMESTIC COST?

(U) Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

ARMENIAN-POLISH SECURITY COOPERATION AGREEMENT

1. (SBU) On September 6, Armenian President Robert Kocharian signed a security cooperation agreement with Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski which will lay the groundwork for the deployment to Iraq of 50 Armenian non-combat troops with Polish forces. George Kocharian, Head of the Military-Political Cooperation Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, confirmed that the GOAM intends to deploy mostly transport personnel, trucks, a few de-miners, and three doctors. He noted that the GOAM wanted to act in unity with Europe and shoulder an adequate amount of the burden so that Armenia would truly be part of the European "club." A newspaper associated with the defense ministry reasoned that deployment to Iraq would significantly improve U.S./Armenian relations and offset the "advantage" Azerbaijan currently enjoys in a more favorable relationship with the U.S.

OPPOSITION JUMPS ON THE ISSUE

2. (SBU) Several Armenian opposition newspapers raised concerns that deployment to Iraq could harm Armenia's relationship with Russia, and the (frequently less-than-reliable) opposition newspaper Haykakan Zhamanak used the opportunity to take aim at Minister of Defense, Serzh Sargsian. In an uncharacteristically pro-Russian stance, the paper repeated Russian newspaper accusations that Sargsian had "betrayed" Russia, and the quoted a disaffected general who disagreed with deployment, supposedly speaks with the authority of the Russian military general staff, but who has more authority than his "illegitimate supreme commander." The opposition, which has often hailed the Council of Europe and Western-supported NGOs during human rights' disputes, now seems ready to exploit pro-Russian biases in order to embarrass the Kocharian government.
EVANS